

THE ILL HEALTH OF FRANCIS PARKMAN.

BY GEORGE M. GOULD, M.D., PHILADELPHIA, PA.

Boyhood. — Francis Parkman was born Sept. 16, 1823, in Boston, of the best New England ancestry. Farnham says that the tragic element in his life was probably as much the result of ignorance as of inherited weakness. As to "inherited weakness," one cannot inherit from ancestors what they have not, and there is not a hint that I have been able to discover which shows that Parkman's parents or grandparents had any of the physical troubles which made him suffer so grievously during his entire life. In his autobiographic letter he says of himself that his childhood was neither healthful nor buoyant, and that for a time though active he was not robust. Farnham says he had a delicate and sensitive physique, and was therefore sent at the age of eight to his grandfather's farm at Medford, Mass. Speaking of himself, Parkman says:

"I walked twice a day to a school of high but undeserved reputation, about a mile distant in the town of Medford. Here I learned very little, and spent the intervals of schooling more profitably in collecting eggs, insects and reptiles, trapping squirrels and woodchucks, and making persistent though rarely fortunate attempts to kill birds with arrows." Farnham adds that the woods, indeed, were so seductive as to be responsible for considerable truancy on his part, and some consequent fibbing. Those years at Medford were counted among his happiest, for the manifold interests and activities of country life were very congenial to his tastes.

"The causes of his early illnesses are enveloped in more or less mystery," says Farnham. "He

was a headachy boy," Miss Parkman thinks,¹ and this illuminative remark, incidentally made, when coupled with the entire subsequent history of Parkman's life, hints at the key which unlocks the doors of the mystery. Boys of good stock and habits do not have headache except for good and sufficient reasons. When they live in the country and play truant, etc., as this boy did, the truancy is likely to be due to the unconscious desire to avoid headache. In such cases, as good oculists well known, the headache is most likely due to eyestrain. Reading thus between the lines, the oculist who remembers a large number of cases in his private practice of similar development in boys will also be struck by the likeness of essential psychologic conditions in the lives of the youth time of De Quincey and of Darwin. The erudite boy De Quincey was driven by the unconscious discomfort felt in study to years of vagrancy in the Welsh hills and elsewhere, and the intellectual son of intellectual parentage, Darwin, made his father despair by his addiction to "shooting, dogs, and rat catching." These and numerous instances in my practice have led me to formulate a rule as to the "truancy" and "play" and "athletics" of boys naturally intellectual, but who show a strangely illogic tendency to avoid all study of a severe or continuous kind. They will not and of course cannot explain it, but they will not read and study, and at once upon the application of spectacles correcting the ametropia which made study result in suffering or unconscious irritability, these "obstinate"

¹ Personal communication. From the age of twelve (he being then twenty-one) his sister was his almost constant assistant and companion. (Since this was in type Miss Parkman tells me there is some doubt in her mind or in that of her sister as to the fact of headache in boyhood. It is not of much import. Boys with eyestrain usually avoid headache by avoiding reading and writing.)

and "wild" boys lead their classes and become men of learning or intellectual power.

"At the age of eleven or twelve," writes Parkman of himself, when he was forty-five, "he conceived a vehement liking for pursuits a devotion to which at that time of life far oftener indicates a bodily defect than a mental superiority. Chemical experiment was his favorite hobby, and he pursued it with a tenacious eagerness which well-guided would have led to an acquaintance with the rudiments of the science, but which in fact served little other purpose than injuring him by confinement, poisoning him with noxious gases, and occasionally scorching him with some ill-starred explosion." "Baneful to body and mind," he again pronounces this interest in chemistry.

During the years from thirteen to seventeen we infer that he was attending school in Boston at the Chauncy Hall School. We do not hear that he was studious, and all hints show that both before and after this he was far from being so.

The age of fifteen or sixteen produced a revolution. At that momentous period of life retorts and crucibles were forever discarded, and an activity somewhat excessive took the place of voluntary confinement. A new passion seized him, which, but half gratified, still holds its force. He became enamored of the woods, a fancy which soon gained full control over the course of the literary pursuits to which he was also addicted.

The college student. — He entered Harvard College in 1840. His biographer says he devoted himself with ardor to his special interests — the study of rhetoric and history, the pursuit of physical development and a knowledge of the American wilderness. How great, or rather, how little was his ardor for book study, may be gathered from the statement of his friend Mr. Wheelwright concerning his social and student life at college:

He was very little in his own room, except at night for the purpose of sleeping. His constant craving for

bodily exercise kept him out-of-doors or at the gymnasium the greater part of the day.

He now began, on entering Harvard, a course of physical training, by which he hoped to acquire the utmost strength, agility and endurance. . . . He took long walks at a pace his companions found it hard to keep up. . . . One of his strongest characteristics, a love of stir and movement, pushed him to excessive activity. (Farnham.)

Parkman says of himself that he formed the plan of devoting himself to history-writing at the age of eighteen, and that to prepare himself "he entered upon a training tolerably well fitted to serve his purpose." One at first smiles at finishing this sentence describing this training — "slighted all college studies which could not promote it, and pursued with avidity such as had a bearing upon it, however indirect." Parkman himself continues:

His reliance, however, was less on books than on such personal experience as should in some sense identify him with his theme. His natural inclinations urged him in the same direction, for his thoughts were always in the forests, whose features, not unmingled with softer images, possessed his waking and sleeping dreams, filling him with vague cravings impossible to satisfy. As fond of hardships as he was vain of enduring them, cherishing a sovereign scorn for every physical weakness or defect, deceived, moreover, by a rapid development of frame and sinews, which flattered him with the belief that discipline sufficiently unsparing would harden him into an athlete, he slighted the precautions of a more reasonable woodcraft, tired old foresters with long marches, stopped neither for heat nor rain, and slept on the earth without a blanket.

During his college course he spent his vacations in long trips to the wilds of New England, in 1841 to Portsmouth, Lake Winnepesaukee, Mt. Washington, etc., to the Androscoggin and Magalloway rivers. In 1842 a similar trip was made, and in 1843 one to Canada for historical materials, examining battlefields, etc. His physical condi-

tion and athletic powers were so well known that it was a surprise to his friends when in his junior year (1843) he gave up his studies and went to Europe "for his health." "Nothing," says Farnham, "very definite is known of the cause of this sudden change. Some think it was a trouble with his eyes, but there is no reference to this in his diaries and the few letters he wrote. It was probably, as others intimate, with apparently better knowledge, a trouble of the heart resulting from overstrain in the gymnasium at Harvard."² Parkman sailed in September and — a side light on the rigor of college courses and discipline at that time — he returned in time the next year to be present at the graduation exercises.

As a law student. — Graduated in 1844 by Harvard, he at once entered the Law School, and received the degree of Bachelor of Laws in 1846. He never entered the bar, and judging from the hints given we may suppose his teachers and examiners were as lenient as they had been in the classical department. Of this period Parkman says:

"While following the prescribed courses at a quiet pace, I entered in earnest on two other courses, one of general history, the other of Indian history and ethnology, and at the same time studied diligently the models of English style, which various pursuits were far from excluding the pleasures of society."

When a student in the law school, he joined a class in riding under the instruction of a circus manager. With his chivalrie and spirited temper he must have taken great pleasure in this knightly exercise. He chose the hardest horses, practiced riding in every form, with or without a saddle or stirrups; could run, leap, jump on a charger at full speed — in short, perform feats which only a "professional" could execute. In this study he probably had in view his "Oregon Trail" trip, which occurred soon after. If our athletic games had then been in vogue, his skill,

²The gymnasium was established in his junior year.

courage, coolness and activity would have made him a successful competitor. (Farnham).

"The first trouble of which we have any definite knowledge," says Farnham, "was the beginning of an affection of the eyes." This extremely indefinite "definiteness" is further described as follows: "During his first year at the Law School, 1844-45, he rose very early and studied by candle light, often without a fire. In the course of the next winter, when confined to the house by some sickness, he, for the first time, pursued his studies by listening to reading." The journeys undertaken during his law course are epitomized by Farnham and show the fiery energy that drove him over so much of the country.³

"*'The Oregon Trail,'*" writes Farnham, "was undertaken partly to cure his eyes, partly to study Indian life." His friend Shaw and himself left St. Louis April 28, 1846, "on a tour of curiosity and amusement," quoting Parkman.

³ The vacations of the year he devoted to historical research. Taking his rifle, he tramped alone over the hills of western Massachusetts, to study the routes followed by the French and Indians in their attacks on that region. He passed through Springfield, Cabotville (old name of Chicopee), Chester Factory, Lee, Stockbridge, Great Barrington, Mount Washington, Lebanon Springs, Stephentown, the Hopper and North Adams.

The diary of 1845 shows that he had now focused his ambitions on a definite work—the "Conspiracy of Pontiac." In April of that year he made a trip to St. Louis and spent the summer in collecting materials for this volume. He visited Lancaster, Paradise, Harrisburg, Williamsport, Trout Run, Blossburg, Corning, Seneca Lake, Rochester, Buffalo, Detroit, Windsor, Sandwich, Mackinaw, Sault Ste. Marie, Palmer, Newport, Niagara, Oswego, Syracuse and Onondaga Castle. In all these journeys he showed indefatigable energy and alertness, and while his main interest was historical research, in which pursuit he noted the scenery of historic places, examined family papers and other documents and wherever it was possible interviewed descendants of the actors in his historic drama, his diary reveals almost as much of interest in nature, human nature and civilization. The sketches he contributed to the *Knickerbocker Magazine* show something of these tendencies crystallized in literary forms. In the winter of 1846 he made a trip through Pennsylvania, visiting Trenton, Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, Harrisburg, Carlisle, Chambersburg and Pittsburg. This year is marked also by his most adventurous and important expedition, the trip of the "Oregon Trail."

In the preface of the book, written in 1872, he says:

As regards the motives which sent us to the mountains, our liking for them would have sufficed; but, in my case, another incentive was added. I went in great measure as a student, to prepare for a literary undertaking of which the plan was already formed, but which from the force of inexorable circumstances, is still but half accomplished. It was this that prompted some proceedings on my part, which, without a fixed purpose in view might be charged with youthful rashness. My business was observation, and I was willing to pay dearly for the opportunity of exercising it.

At Fort Laramie he was taken down with dysentery, and says of himself in the "Oregon Trail":

I had been slightly ill for several weeks, but on the third night after reaching Fort Laramie, a violent pain awoke me, and I found myself attacked by the same disorder that occasioned such heavy losses to the army on the Rio Grande. In a day and a half I was reduced to extreme weakness, so that I could not walk without pain and effort. Having within that time taken six grains of opium without the least beneficial effect,⁴ and having no medical adviser, nor any choice of diet, I resolved to throw myself upon Providence for recovery, using without regard to the disorder any portion of strength that might remain to me. So on the 20th of June we set out from Fort Laramie. Though aided by the high bow "mountain saddle" I could scarcely keep my seat on horseback.

Another quotation from the "Oregon Trail" goes into further details of his condition:

"At this time I was so reduced by illness that I could seldom walk without reeling like a drunken man, and when I rose from my seat upon the ground the landscape suddenly grew dim before my eyes, the trees and lodges seemed to sway to and fro, and the prairie to rise and fall like the swells of the ocean. . . . I tried repose and a very sparing diet. For a long time, with exemplary patience,

⁴ This part of this sentence is oddly omitted in my copy of the "Oregon Trail," preface of 1872.

I lounged about the camp, or at the utmost staggered over to the Indian village, and walked faint and dizzy among the lodges. It would not do; and I bethought me of starvation. During five days I sustained life on one small biscuit a day. At the end of that time I was weaker than before, but the disorder seemed shaken in its stronghold and very gradually I began to resume a less rigid diet."

He soon recovered and wrote that, "hardship and exposure had thriven with me wonderfully. I had gained both health and strength," and was "in high spirits." He had some relapses at a later date, but soon gained rapidly, ate well and went out hunting for sport, etc.

In his autobiographic letter, written years afterward, he speaks as follows of his life with the Indians:

On a journey of a hundred miles over a country in parts of the roughest, he had gained rather than lost strength, while his horse was knocked up and his companion disconsolate with a painful cough.

The long and exhausting buffalo hunts toward the end of the trip, for the fun of the thing, and the homeward journey down the Arkansas Valley, show how strong and essentially unharmed he really was in health. Of another he wrote, "He was complaining that night of a disease the wasting effects of which upon a younger and stronger man, I myself had proved from severe experience."⁵

⁵ Approaching St. Louis an incident occurred which must be quoted in full: "... Dr. Dobbs is there besides. I asked who Dr. Dobbs might be. 'One of our St. Louis doctors,' replied Tête Rouge. For two days past I had been severely attacked by the same disorder which had so greatly reduced my strength when at the mountains; at this time I was suffering not a little from pain and weakness. Tête Rouge in answer to my inquiries, declared that Dr. Dobbs was a physician of the first standing. Without at all believing him, I resolved to consult this eminent practitioner. He offered in his own person but indifferent evidence of his skill, for it was five months since I had seen so cadaverous a face. ... I said I had come to ask professional advice.

"Your system, sir, is in a disordered state," said he, solemnly, after a short examination.

"I inquired what might be the particular species of disorder.

"Evidently a disordered state of the liver," replied the medical

I have felt it necessary to quote so fully concerning the "Oregon Trail" trip, because Mr. Farnham, in ignorance of the real pathogenic condition, has in his comments put the matter in a wrong light. He says that "his mind at times lost its clearness." "The prolonged and excessive strain of the journey permanently impaired his digestion, thus reducing his powers to resist the development of disease. In this way the Oregon trip was the immediate cause of his infirmities, though some of them may have had their source in heredity." Farnham indeed suggests that his lifelong insomnia was due to this journey, and that "inflammation and weakness of the eyes naturally increased with the decline of his general health on the Oregon trip." Finally Farnham says that the "Oregon Trail" trip thus cost Parkman his health for life.

Farnham here repeats the same error as was exposed in a previous study of Darwin, concerning the effects of the Beagle voyage. As Darwin returned from the voyage unharmed, sound and healthy, so Parkman came home from the Oregon trip essentially without any permanent injury. His subsequent ill-health had nothing whatever to do with the hardships and temporary intestinal troubles of the outing among the Indians. "The sport," says Parkman, "was good, and the faith undoubting that to tame the devil, it is best to take him by the horns." The cause of all his succeeding illness (except of course the arthritis and rheumatism that came on later) was not suspected by himself or his biographer. This was eyestrain, which played no part during his Oregon

man; 'I will give you a prescription.' . . . He presented me with a folded paper. 'What is it?' said I. 'Calomel,' said the doctor.

"Under the circumstances I would have taken almost anything. There was not enough to do me much harm and it might possibly do good; so at camp that night I took the poison instead of supper.

journey, but which began its dominating influence at once upon his return to civilization, and made every day of his after life the supreme concern, and every hour one of hidden suffering.

To the alert-minded reader it will have become apparent that the school truancy, the interest in chemistry, the woods-roaming, the furious athleticism, the trip to Europe, the early choice of the peculiar historic subjects upon which to write — all were proofs only of a strange though unrecognized suffering when he wrote or read. The Oregon journey, itself preceded by the thousand-mile tramps and wanderings, were upon any other supposition strangely illogical. Parkman bravely convinced himself they were necessary to his preparation as a historical writer. But what a pitiable means to the end! It is plain that it was all but a powerful and subtle reaction against the ocular and cerebral injury wrought by the impossibility of visual labor with pen and type. There is, indeed, a large and hidden wisdom of the organism, a fused forefeeling and unconscious determination of the psychic and biologic personality which steadily and determinedly does the best it can with the condition at hand, the inherited tastes and abilities and the forelying circumstance or necessity of life. The youth and the entire life of Parkman, willed and potent as he was, is an illustration of how little the most dictatorial "environment" could conquer or long influence the more dominating temper of his character. Fate made him a true Yankee, and demanded his employment with intellectual and even with literary matters. It also gave him eyes that in any other man in the world would have rendered his living resultless to the world, and every hour a torture to himself. The torture he knew not how to escape, but he

wrung from the bitterest suffering and the most un pitying fate great results for the world.

In spite of the fact that during his early years he was a wood-roamer, and even made commendable natural history collections, he was no scientist, and however ardently and arduously he prosecuted tree lore or animal study, or later chemistry, and still later horticulture, it is perfectly evident that his title rôle was not as scientist. He was cast by God for another part, and his soul's eye was set upon another ideal. He filled the small rôles as well as he could, but why he played them at all, and why he soon wearied of them, this is explained only by the fact that injury to eyes and the nervous system was unconsciously felt whenever he used his eyes in protracted reading and study. Hence he was driven to muscular activity, and being an intellectual man he could but choose the sole outlets for energy which united action and thought. The restless demon that from the depths of great men's souls ever cries out, *March, march!* begins his orders even in boyhood. In Parkman's case it was a very literal command, iron and uncompassionate. The order had been obeyed from early boyhood on, and by eighteen he found that he could "march" and be an intellectual and creative man at the same time, only by taking as his life work the peculiar kind of historical writing which demanded or seemed to demand many extensive journeys and original research not solely of a bookish kind. This decision and the theme of his work were of course consonant with the character of the man, but had it not been for his unrecognized although active ocular affliction, the peculiar choice would not have been made. This comes out in Parkman's graphic account of the conditions of his mind and life in which he speaks

of the result of his strenuous efforts as culminating in

A state of mental tension, habitual for several years, and abundantly mischievous in many respects. With a mind overstrained and a body overtaken, he was burning the candle at both ends . . . a pernicious intensity . . . a highly irritable organism spurred the writer to excess in a course which with one of different temperament would have produced a free and hardy development of such faculties and forces as he possessed. . . . Soon, however, he became conscious that the impelling force was growing beyond his control. Labor became a passion and rest intolerable, yet with a keen appetite for social enjoyment, in which he found not only a pleasure but in some sense repose, the stimulus rapidly increased. Despite of judgment and of will, his mind turned constantly towards remote objects of pursuit, and strained vehemently to attain them. The condition was that of a rider whose horse runs headlong, the bit between his teeth, or of a locomotive, built of indifferent material, under a head of steam too great for its strength, hissing at a score of crevices, yet rushing on with accelerating speed to the inevitable smash.

There is in these lines, as in everything written by Parkman about himself, a startling clearness of spiritual diagnosis, a truthfulness of view as to the facts and symptoms, and a most tragic failure to catch a glimpse of the pathologic condition that caused them. How near the eye came to seeing itself is shown by this swift glance:

It was impossible that conditions of the nervous system, abnormal as it had been from infancy, should be without their effects on the mind, and some of these were of a nature highly to exasperate him. Unconscious of their character and origin, and ignorant that with time and confirmed health they would have disappeared, he had no other thought than that of crushing them by force, and accordingly applied himself to the work.

How little they did or could have "disappeared with time and confirmed health" we now know, and as his whole after life proved, only science makes it possible for the eye to see itself.

Parkman's rigorous athleticism. — We have seen that Parkman seemed to be impelled to an extreme of athleticism by some illogical and half-unrecognized impulse. Farnham says of Parkman that

His chief error was the not uncommon mistake of regarding exercise as the all-sufficient means of securing health. While developing his muscles he failed in the larger duty of acquiring a thorough knowledge of the laws of health. His physical culture had as close a connection with his personality as any other part of his education. His tastes and ruling traits pointed in advance to his course and the dangers he would be likely to meet. Early in his life muscular development became his hobby; he desired to equal the Indian in strength, agility, endurance and skill in woodcraft; he also became convinced that a healthy mind could exist only in a healthy body. But in pursuing these laudable aims he was exposed to many risks. His self-discipline began when he was yet a boy at home; he would not permit himself habits or thoughts tending in the least to weaken the central virtue of manliness. . . . Thus the ways of the prudent, complaining and self-indulgent invalid were to him worthy only of contempt. He himself, going to the other extreme, drove his body to exercise with an excessive and destructive ambition. He treated his infirmities by the fatal method of "crushing them by force," attaining almost a savage's endurance of pain. If the strongest mind, bent on attaining health and ignoring illness, were able to cure disease by will power, Parkman should have been the healthiest of men.

Concerning this aspect of his life, Parkman wrote of himself:

But if a systematic and steady course of physical activity can show no better result, have not the advantages of such a course been overrated? In behalf of manhood and common sense, he would protest against such a conclusion; and if any pale student, glued to his desk here, seek an apology for a way of life whose natural fruit is that pallid and emasculate scholarship of which New England has had too many examples, it will be far better that this sketch had not been written. For the student there is, in its season, no better place than the saddle, and no better companion than the rifle or the oar. A highly

irritable organism spurred the writer to excess in a course which, with one of different temperament, would have produced a free and hardy development of such faculties and forces as he possessed. Nor, even in the case in question, was the evil unmixed, since from the same source whence it issued came also the habit of mind and muscular vigor which saved him from a ruin absolute and irremediable.

In the words "a highly irritable organism spurred to excess," Parkman, with his usual precision, stated the facts without, of course, knowing the reason, or understanding why he had the "highly irritable organism." As an echo of this diagnosis Farnham again caught a glimpse of the truth when he wrote:

His love of action always pulled against his love of study. Such seemingly incompatible passions are rarely seen together in such force. Even in his college days, while still in good health and much interested in physical culture, he was marked as a man of retirement and industry, a reserved, brooding student, who seldom invited any one to his room, and at the same time an impetuous, social youth. But action was his first instinctive mode of expression, his chief pleasure in life. And it was, moreover, a kind of abnormal, physical necessity, as well as a propensity of his mind.

More accurately and tersely Parkman's friend, Dr. George E. Ellis, saw the truth when he wrote that:

His maladies intensified his impulses to exertion and mental application, while they limited the hours he could wisely give to reading and writing.

It is strange, as we now look back at the history, that none of his friends, not even the clear head of the patient himself, should have recognized the fact that the reflexes of eyestrain produced the "highly irritable organism" and pushed him to the furious physical activity which served at once to spare his eyes and to act as an out-

let for the abnormal irritation engendered by their use. He was accustomed to say, "I shall go to pieces if I do not exercise," or "I must exercise."⁶

On the gridiron and by means of the grid-iron.— In 1846 Parkman returned to work, but found that only by the help of eyes other than his own could he do anything toward realizing his literary ideals. He dictated the "Oregon Trail," in the autumn, which was published in the *Knickerbocker Magazine* in 1847, and then took up "Pontiac." Farnham writes:

He devoted himself largely to medical treatment during 1847 and 1848. He spent the greater part of these years in New York and at West New Brighton on Staten Island, under the care of an oculist, also at a water cure in Brattleboro, Vt., to improve his general health. He returned to his father's house in 1849, having reaped but little benefit from the efforts of the doctors,— the "medical faculty," as he used to call them. With the help of his friend, Charles Eliot Norton, in reading proof, he was able to prepare "The Oregon Trail" for publication in book form.

In 1853 "the enemy" again became too aggressive to be ignored, and again he resorted to water cure at Northampton. He was always willing to give the doctors every facility and to undergo any method of treatment, following faithfully the advice he sought,— excepting in regard to giving up writing.

Meanwhile, with the help of his wife and her sister, Miss Mary Bigelow, as amanuensis, he pushed along his literary labors.

Speaking of himself in his autobiographic letter, Parkman says as regards his physical, mental and ocular symptoms, that in a few months after his return to the settlements he

⁶ Personal communication by his most kind and capable general physician, Dr. Oliver, who attended him for many years and to whom I am indebted for valuable and accurate information. When he could not walk, breathing and other sedentary exercises, rowing, etc., were devised "to relieve the pressure."

"found himself in a condition but ill adapted to support his theory." He continues:

To the maladies of the prairie succeeded a suite of exhausting disorders, so reducing him that circulation at the extremities ceased, the light of the sun became insupportable and a wild whirl possessed his brain, joined to a universal turmoil of the nervous system which put his philosophy to the sharpest test it had hitherto known. All collapsed, in short, but the tenacious strength of muscles hardened by long activity. This condition was progressive, and did not reach its height—or, to speak more fitly, its depth—until some eighteen months after his return. The prospect before him was by no means attractive, contrasting somewhat pointedly with his boyish fancy of a life of action and a death in battle. Indeed, the change from intense activity to flat stagnation, attended with an utter demolition of air castles, may claim a place not of the meanest in that legion of mental tortures which make the torments of the *Inferno* seem endurable. The desire was intense to return to the prairie and try a hair of the dog that bit him; but this kill or cure expedient was debarred by the certainty that a few days' exposure to the open sunlight would have destroyed his sight.

The autobiographic letter goes on:

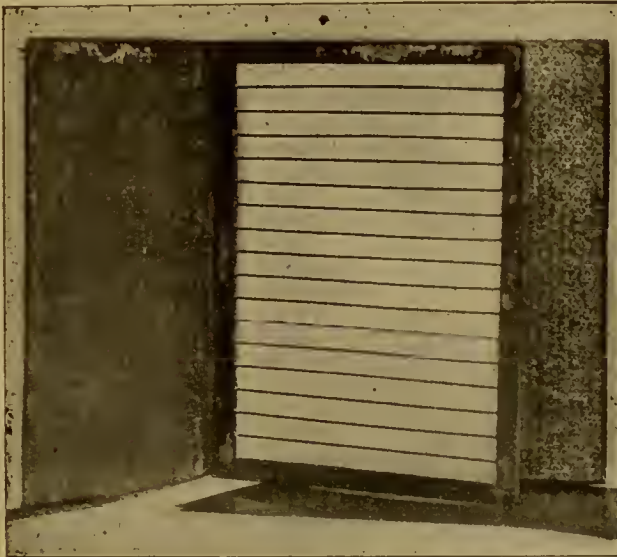
In the spring of 1848, the condition indicated being then at its worst, the writer resolved to attempt the composition of the "History of the Conspiracy of Pontiac," of which the material had been for some time collected and the ground prepared. The difficulty was so near to the impossible that the line of distinction often disappeared, while medical prescience condemned the plan as a short road to dire calamities. His motive, however, was in part a sanitary one, growing out of a conviction that nothing could be more deadly to his bodily and mental health than the entire absence of a purpose and an object. The difficulties were threefold: an extreme weakness of sight, disabling him even from writing his name except with eyes closed; a condition of the brain prohibiting fixed attention except at occasional and brief intervals; and an exhaustion and total derangement of the nervous system, producing of necessity a mood of mind most unfavorable to effort. To be made with impunity, the attempt must be made with the most watchful caution.

He caused a wooden frame to be constructed of the

size and shape of a sheet of letter paper. Stout wires were fixed horizontally across it, half an inch apart, and a movable baek of thiek pasteboard fitted behind them. The paper for writing was placed between the pasteboard and the wires, guided by which, and using a blaek lead crayon, he could write not illegibly with closed eyes.⁷

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He was at the time absent from home on Staten Island, where, and in the neighboring eity of New York. he had



PARKMAN'S GRIDIRON.

(From a photograph of the original instrument.)

friends who willingly offered their aid. It is needless to say to which half of humanity nearly all these kind assistants belonged. He chose for a beginning that part of the

⁷ This, with the allusion in the second letter, is Parkman's only reference to this instrument, and his reticence as regards what seems to me one of the most heroic and pathetic experiences in history is profoundly touching. Miss Parkman has loaned me the "gridiron," and I reproduce here a photograph of it. The original I hope will be preserved in the archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society. A more precious relic will never come into their keeping.

work which offered fewest difficulties and with the subject of which he was most familiar, namely, the siege of Detroit. The books and documents, already partially arranged, were procured from Boston, and read to him at such times as he could listen to them, the length of each reading never, without injury, much exceeding half an hour, and periods of several days frequently occurring during which he could not listen at all. Notes were made by him with closed eyes, and afterwards deciphered and read to him till he had mastered them. For the first half year, the rate of composition averaged about six lines a day. The portion of the book thus composed was afterwards partially rewritten.

His health improved under the process, and the remainder of the volume — in other words, nearly the whole of it — was composed in Boston, while pacing in the twilight of a large garret, the only exercise which the sensitive condition of his sight permitted him in an unclouded day while the sun was above the horizon. It was afterwards written down from dictation by relatives under the same roof, to whom he was also indebted for the preparatory readings. His progress was much less tedious than at the outset, and the history was complete in about two years and a half.

Farnham writes as follows:

He passed through at least four severe crises of pain and disability within a period of twenty years. The extent of his sufferings is nowhere revealed, only hinted at in writing; he is remembered, however, by an intimate friend or two to have said that death would often have been a welcome end of his trials. Generally he passed acute attacks either in turning his thoughts and conversation to light and jocose topics, or in silent and patient endurance. Once, when his physician, during a bad attack, encouraged him by saying that he had a strong constitution, Parkman replied quaintly, "I'm afraid I have." There is nothing to tell of these crises beyond the patience and fortitude with which he endured them. Sometimes, however, he felt so strongly that he had had more than his share of suffering, that a fresh attack would cause him to explode in a few very forcible expressions; then his quiet patience soon regained the mastery.

Parkman has said:

From a complete and ample experience of both, I can

bear witness that no amount of physical pain is so intolerable as the position of being stranded and doomed to lie rotting for year after year. However, I have not yet abandoned any plan which I ever formed, and I have no intention of abandoning any.⁸

Driven to horticulture. — With a productive ability limited to about six lines a day, and the use of "the gridiron" to do so much, even Parkman's stout heart was daunted. But he met fate most courageously, and the manner of doing it again shows plainly the lesson to be found in his previous experiences. That he was not an eager and spontaneous nature-lover is clear from the fact that the woods were left by him unvisited for forty years after that phase of the reaction had passed in his youth.⁹ That he cared nothing for chemistry comes out in the fact that he never busied himself with it a minute after the enthusiasm of his boyhood had passed.

⁸ Farnham was doubtless justified in quoting as having a personal significance and application a passage from Parkman's novel:

"It is but a weak punishment to which Milton dooms his ruined angel. Action, enterprise, achievement,—a hell like that is heaven to the cells of Ehrenberg. He should have chained him to a rock and left him alone to the torture of his own thoughts; the unutterable agonies of a mind preying on itself for want of other sustenance. Action! mured in this dungeon, the soul gasps for it as the lungs for air. Action, action, action! — all in all! What is life without it? A marsh, a quagmire, a rotten, stagnant pool. It is its own reward. The chase is all; the prize nothing."

And how personal are his reflections on the prospect of no escape from his misfortunes:

"Yet it is something that I can still find heart to face my doom; that there are still moments when I dare to meet this death-in-life, this slow-consuming horror, face to face, and look into all its hideousness without shrinking. To creep on to my end through years of slow decay, mind and soul famishing in solitude, sapped and worn, eaten and fretted away, by the droppings of lonely thought till I find my rest at last under these cursed stones."

⁹ It is surprising that he should never once have sought the wilderness during forty years after his trip to the Rocky Mountains. His lameness naturally made travel in the woods difficult; yet he often journeyed far to collect historic material. But it is probable that he loved the adventures of a wild life more than the wilderness itself; and therefore neither the woods nor the prairies had of themselves power to attract him after his infirmities denied him perfect freedom in physical activity. Certainly he drove on his literary labors in spite of obstacles, with a persistence, courage and energy that would have enabled him frequently to visit the wilderness had the love of nature been his dominant passion.

That travel and journeys among Indians, etc., in search of materials for his histories was not demanded by the historical mind is again manifest that the "Oregon Trail" had exhausted that necessity. All these, his rage for athletics and similar facts, demonstrate that these methods of spending energy served the sole purpose of satisfying the demands of his nervous mechanism for an outlet for derouted energy. They were caught up compromises with the compelling demon, who denied legitimate and logical obedience, forced the boy and the man to a morbid and excessive activity in any way that circumstance pointed. But at every step in life there was the growing impossibility of carrying out the ideal, even by the most abnormal energies or the most pathetic self-renunciation. Only the tragedy of Carlyle's similar life and experience can be compared with that of Parkman, and in exquisite poignancy Parkman's seems the more awful. Just as all previous attempts to meet the ingravescient evil had been morbid methods of disposing of the energy of the reflex ocular neurosis, which was his abiding source of mischief, so now Parkman was compelled to turn his attention to horticulture. From 1851 to 1865 there was published no considerable work; a novel and a book of verses gave glimpses only of the imprisoned soul crying out in the night. His sister tells me that during these years not all preparations for historical work were renounced. Something was always going on, at least in his mind.

His biographer says of him that as to his health he showed a commendable docility when advised by his physicians, but that "in one particular he persistently refused obedience — he would not give up his literary labor wholly, even when the doctors forbade it under threats of the most

serious consequences; and when they told him to prepare for death, he straightway prepared to write books." At last, however, driven entirely to the wall, being unable to use his eyes even to sign his name, he adopted horticulture as an outlet for his energy and to fill the time with some occupation as close to his hand and as interesting as possible.

When able to walk he would go at a rapid gait from place to place, and sit down on a stool carried for the purpose; he would then do some of the lighter work, such as sowing seeds, planting borders, weeding and cultivating. . . . Sometimes the sensitiveness of his eyes prevented him from being out of doors in the sunlight. He acquired great fame as a horticulturist.

There are abundant evidences that he was not profoundly interested in this subject, and all his botanical successes and fame did not keep his mind's eye from the one aim of his life to which he returned so soon as his eyes and health permitted.

Fighting it out with "the enemy." — Parkman was accustomed to anthropomorphize the hidden sources of his physiologic evils as "the enemy" or his "cerebral devil." He had no mind to be defeated in the battle, and least of all to acknowledge defeat. Lamed though he was, his brisk step and alert manner made a French friend call him by the nickname of the *cerf agile*. "He could never abide weakness," says Farnham, "either physical, mental or moral; men, women, opinions, emotions, to command his admiration must show strength and energy." "Even when confined to his wheelchair he would split wood, hoe in the garden, rake or cut grass, etc." "One day in talking over a biographical notice in which a friend had dwelt on the historian's feebleness, he exclaimed, 'Damn it, I'm not feeble!'"

Shortly after the death of his wife he went abroad, and spent the winter of 1858-59 in Paris, at the Hôtel de France et de Bath. His brain was then in such a condition that the most eminent specialists of Paris warned him against insanity and forbade him all literary labor; but while spending his time chiefly in observing the life of the streets from the tops of omnibuses, he yet managed to make some investigations in the archives and to arrange for the copying of documents. Returning to Boston without any improvement in his alarming condition, he joined the family of his mother and sisters.

1868 was a year of exceptional suffering, rendering all work impossible, although he accepted election as overseer of Harvard College. Finding that complete idleness now seemed necessary, and preferring Paris to any other place for such a life, he went abroad for the winter, establishing himself in lodgings at No. 21 Boulevard Saint Michel. Here he was vainly sought after by some of the writers of Paris and the élite of the Faubourg St. Germain. In the course of the winter his health improved sufficiently to enable him to enjoy sightseeing and even make some researches, so that at his return in the spring of 1869 he resumed his labors and saw "La Salle" through the press.

In 1886 he camped a month with me. . . . His lame knee. . . . He could not walk enough to do more than fire a few rounds in camp at a target. . . . His infirmities never allowed him to make the journey a second time.

His maladies compelled him in 1888 to resign his office of Fellow of the Corporation of Harvard after a service of thirteen years.

The close of Parkman's life was both happy and characteristic: his work done, his reputation still in the ascendant, his friends increasing in number and appreciation. He had always hoped to die before reaching the lingering weakness and decrepitude of old age, for such a soul could not but dread anything that even pointed towards a diminution of power. When a friend once spoke with pride of the work he had done, his energy flamed out with the promise to do still more if he should live. His last summer was a very happy one; comparative freedom from pain and the absence of anxiety as to the completion of his work brought both comfort and peace.

He had phlebitis of the leg in 1892, and for the first time he was then compelled to take to his bed.

On coming in from his last row, on a Sunday, he felt ill and took to his bed. Peritonitis set in, but he rallied so much by Tuesday evening that a successful surgical operation was thought possible. This hope had to be dismissed when he began to sink on Wednesday morning. He died peacefully about noon of that day, on the 8th of November, 1893.

Parkman's method of carryiny on literary work. — The following quotations seem necessary to give the student of this case an adequate sense of the difficulties and cost of Parkman's ocular abnormality. They are from the autobiography:

He then entered upon the subject of "France in the New World," a work, or series of works, involving minute and extended investigation. The difficulties which met him at the outset were incalculable. Wholly unable to use his eyes, he had before him the task, irksome at best when there is no natural inclination for it, of tracing out, collecting, indexing, arranging and digesting a great mass of incongruous material scattered on both sides of the Atlantic. Those pursuing historical studies under the disadvantages of impaired sight have not hitherto attempted in person this kind of work during the period of their disability, but have deputed it to skilled and trusty assistants, a most wise course in cases where it is practicable. The writer, however, partly from the nature of his subject and his plan, though in special instances receiving very valuable aid, was forced in the main to rely on his own research. The language was chiefly French, and the reader was a girl from the public schools, ignorant of any tongue but her own. The effect, though highly amusing to bystanders, was far from being so to the person endeavoring to follow the meaning of this singular jargon. Catalogues, indexes, tables of contents in abundance were, however, read, and correspondence opened with those who could lend aid or information. Good progress had been made in the preliminary surveys, and many books examined and digested on a systematic plan for future reference, when a disaster befell the writer which set his calculations at naught.

This was an effusion of water on the left knee.

In the severer periods of the disorder, books were discarded for horticulture, which benign pursuit has proved

most salutary in its influences. One year, four years and numerous short intervals, lasting from a day to a month, represent these literary interruptions since the work in hand was begun. Under the most favorable conditions, it was a slow and doubtful navigation, beset with reefs and breakers, demanding a constant lookout and a constant throwing of the lead. Of late years, however, the condition of the sight has so far improved as to permit reading, not exceeding, on the average, five minutes at one time. This modicum of power, though apparently trifling, proved of the greatest service, since, by a cautious management, its application may be extended. By reading for one minute, and then resting for an equal time, this alternate process may generally be continued for about half an hour. Then, after a sufficient interval, it may be repeated, often three or four times in the course of the day. By this means nearly the whole of the volume now offered has been composcd. When the conditions were such as to render systematic application possible, a reader has been employed, usually a pupil of the public schools. On one occasion, however, the services of a young man, highly intelligent, and an excellent linguist, were obtained for a short time. With such assistance every difficulty vanished, but it could not long be continued.

How far, by a process combining the slowness of the tortoise with the uncertainty of the hare, an undertaking of close and extended research can be advanced, is a question to solve which there is no aid from precedent, since it does not appear that an attempt under similar circumstances has hitherto been made. The writer looks, however, for a fair degree of success.

In the second letter he said: "While engaged on these books, I made many journeys in the United States and Canada in search of material, and went four times to Europe with a similar object. The task of exploring archives and collecting documents, to me repulsive at the best, was under the circumstances difficult, and would have been impossible but for the aid of competent assistants working under my direction."

In writing his second letter he said: "Taking the last forty years as a whole, the capacity of literary work which during that time has fallen to my share has, I am confident, been considerably less than a fourth part of what it would have been under normal conditions."

Farnham adds:

In looking at the great mass of manuscript he collected

and digested, one partially realizes by the material evidence of mere bulk how much he did for the sake of thoroughness, but fully only when one remembers the weakness of eyes and brain that increased his labors tenfold. In the preface to "A Half Century of Conflict" he thus referred to his collection at the close of his labors:

"The manuscript material, collected for the preparation of the series now complete, forms about seventy volumes, most of them folios. These have been given by me from time to time to the Massachusetts Historical Society, in whose library they now are open to the examination of those interested in the subjects of which they treat. The collection was begun forty-five years ago, and its formation has been exceedingly slow, having been retarded by difficulties which seemed insurmountable, and for years were so in fact. Hence the completion of the series has required twice the time that would have sufficed under less unfavorable conditions."

While he was in the Law School his sister Miss Eliza S. Parkman remembers that he was ill in bed, and that she began at this time reading to him. She does not know of what he ailed at that time. She was his helper in his literary labors for much of the remainder of his life. Whenever he was able to do any such work it was usually as follows: He made his notes, if able to do so, in the method stated, by writing for a minute or two and then stopping to look at a distance to rest his eyes. He prepared for his dictation by thinking, and usually while lying on his back upon a lounge. He went to his room at nine o'clock in the morning, and if he could dictate for an hour it was considered a good day's work. He could not generally continue so long, a half-hour in the forenoon and less in the afternoon being all he could get through with. He usually held a screen before his eyes while dictating. At first he used no notes while dictating, but later he constantly consulted them. He could only read at best but a few minutes, generally but one or two, and he never did any reading or writing

whatever at night. He habitually avoided looking at any one or at any object steadily. In any sort of literary work, or even while being read to, he would often have to stop with the remark that his head was all "stirred up." A continuous noise tormented him and quiet was always desired. His power to read or write seemed to depend upon his eyes rather than upon his head.

Parkman's estimate of his own case. — It is evident that the mystery of his own ailment weighed so deeply upon his mind that it gave him the strong incentive needed to break over his natural reserve and disinclination to speak of himself. This mystery, he felt, must some time be solved, and the autobiographic letter was his attempt to hand to some aftercomer a document giving so far as in him lay the facts of his strange disease. It must be remembered that it was written in 1868, just prior to his going abroad for medical advice and historical research. It was sealed and inscribed as "not to be used during my life." These are the opening sentences:

Allusion was made at the outset to obstacles which have checked the progress of the work, if the name of obstacles can be applied to obstructions at times impassable and of such a nature that even to contend against them would have been little else than an act of self-destruction. The case in question is certainly an exceptional one; but as it has analogies with various other cases, not rare under the stimulus of our social and material influences, a knowledge of it may prove of use. For this, as for other reasons, the writer judges it expedient to state it in full, though in doing so much personal detail must needs be involved.

In the introductory note he had said:

It resulted from a desire — natural perhaps, but which may just as well be suppressed — to make known the extreme difficulties which have reduced to very small proportions what might otherwise have been a good measure of achievement. Having once begun it, I went on with it,

though convinced that it was wholly unsuited to see the light. Physiologically considered, the case is rather curious. My plan of life from the first was such as would have secured great bodily vigor in nineteen cases out of twenty, and was only defeated in its aim by an inborn irritability of constitution which required gentler treatment than I gave it. If I had my life to live over again, I would follow exactly the same course again, only with less vehemence.

In this recognition of "an inborn irritability of constitution" which defeated his life purpose, Parkman puts his finger, or rather points it, to the heart of the mystery. Again the same inerrant perception appears in his words:

It was impossible that conditions of the nervous system, abnormal as his had been from infancy, should be without their effects on the mind, and some of these were of a nature highly to exasperate him. Unconscious of their character and origin, etc.

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Though the seat of derangement may be the nervous system, it does not of necessity follow that the subject is that which, in the common sense of the word, is called "nervous." The writer was now and then felicitated on "having no nerves" by those who thought themselves maltreated by that mysterious portion of human organism. This subterranean character of the mischief, early declaring itself at the surface, doubtless increased its intensity while it saved it from being a nuisance to those around.

None to whom was hidden the truth of the cerebral and psychic effects of great eyestrain could more accurately describe the tormenting mystery of his case than Parkman has done in the foregoing citations. By this time in his life he was able to see the folly of his athleticism and especially of the "Oregon Trail" to overcome "the enemy," concerning which he now wrote:

As to the advantages of this method of dealing with that subtle personage, some question may have arisen in his mind, when, returning after a few months to the settle-

ments, he found himself but ill adapted to support his theory.

In 1851 he was confined for two years by "an effusion of water on the left knee." And Parkman adds:

The effects of the confinement were as curious as unenviable. All the irritability of the system centered in the head. The most definite of the effects produced was one closely resembling the tension of an iron band, secured around the head and contracting with an extreme force, with the attempt to concentrate the thoughts, listen to reading or at times to engage in conversation. This was, however, endurable in comparison with other forms of attack, which cannot be intelligibly described from want of analogous sensations by which to convey the requisite impressions. The brain was stimulated to a restless activity impelling through it a headlong current of thought, which, however, must be arrested and the irritated organ held in quiescence on a penalty to avert which no degree of exertion was too costly. The whirl, the confusion and strange, undefined torture attending this condition are only to be conceived by one who has felt them. Possibly they may have analogies in the savage punishment once in use in some of our prisons, where drops of water were made to fall from a height on the shaved head of the offender, soon producing an effect which brought to reason the most contumacious. Sleep, of course, was banished during the periods of attack, and in its place was demanded, for the exclusion of thought, an effort more severe than the writer has ever put forth in any other cause. In a few hours, however, a condition of exhaustion would ensue; and, both patient and disease being spent, the latter fell into a dull lethargic stage far more supportable. Excitement or alarm would probably have proved wholly ruinous.

This account is so incomparably accurate and descriptive of the cerebral effects of severe eye-strain that it may be incorporated in textbooks. Innumerable patients have perhaps less exactly but with the same intent and vehemence, and in similar terms, described their symptoms to their oculists. The "iron band about the head," the

vague but intolerable anguish, the "whirl," the "confusion," the "strange, undefined torture," "all the irritability of the system centered in the head" — such are precisely the expressions used by these sufferers. And these symptoms disappear with proper glasses.

The so-called heart trouble. — In 1844 Parkman referred to "a painful beating of his heart." Farnham says that some thought his sudden journey to Europe in 1844 on account of ill health was a trouble of the heart resulting from overstrain in the gymnasium at Harvard. Parkman in his diary, in 1844, speaks of the "cursed injury that brought me to Europe," adding, "as I find no great improvement, I judge it best to see what a French doctor can do for me, instead of running about Spain."

Farnham adds:

This affection, however, does not seem to have been a persistent trouble; it did not prevent him, even at that time, from walking, climbing mountains and ascending cathedral spires as only a vigorous man can do; and the malady does not figure among the chronic troubles of his after life. There is no subsequent mention in his diaries either of disease or medical treatment.

The matter is of no medical importance except to note that, as with several of the other cases studied, this patient also had for a time his cardiac worry.

Rheumatism and lameness. — The arthritis of the knee came on in 1851, and for two years he was unable to walk much. In 1852 he had to be carried out of the house when starting on his trip to the water cure establishment in Northampton, Mass. For many years his lameness did not prevent free walking at times nor horseback exercise; he used also to do what digging and other work he could in his garden. Fortunately

his arms remained serviceable till very near the close of his life, so that he could generally enjoy some form of exercise with them. Even when confined to his wheelchair he could split wood, hoe in his garden, rake or cut with a sickle the grass along the walks; he even did some carpenter work in making foot benches or other objects of utility. During much of his later years he was obliged to use canes or crutches and to carry a stool when working in his garden. Disliking eccentricity of all kinds, he was much annoyed at having to walk in the streets in his peculiar manner; yet he would not give up exercise or social intercourse so long as he could enjoy them by any means whatever. The pain and the loss of freedom caused by his lameness led him for a time to consider amputation of the leg; but the relief hoped for was too doubtful to justify the operation. When rheumatism finally came in the shoulders and stopped the last of his out-of-door exercises, he accepted massage, practiced deep breathing and such other movements as could be executed in a chair.

Wheelwright says of his lameness in his later years:

Long years afterward, when crippled by disease and needing two canes to support his step, he might often be seen in the streets of Boston, walking rapidly for a short distance, then suddenly stopping, wheeling around and propping himself against the wall of a house to give a moment's repose to his enfeebled knee. Whatever he did, he must do it with all his might. He could not saunter, he could not creep; he must move rapidly or stand still. On these walks in the country he often carried his rifle, "Satan." He also did some rowing on Fresh Pond.

Even when his life work was practically over, when completed presbyopia allowed him to enjoy more reading and an untortured brain,

the fates would still not relent. There was an exacerbation of the knee trouble, and this, keeping him from exercise, led to an increase of insomnia, etc.¹⁰

During the last years of his life his lameness was so troublesome that he had an elevator in his house which he was able to operate by his own arms, and in this way he went up stairs and down. This intercurrent affection has of course no significance as regards the disease-producing ocular condition, except that it confined him more, and thus increased his tendency to read or write, which at once resulted in a heightening of his cerebral and nervous reflexes.

¹⁰ For illustration of this period I cannot forbear quoting a letter kindly given me by Dr. Oliver. It is as follows:

SARAGOSSA, SPAIN, 14 April, 1887.

My dear Dr. Oliver, — Excuse the pencil scrawl. Persistent sleeplessness and the fatigue of travel on the damned Spanish trains, which go chiefly by night, has made my head too shaky for a pen. Since landing I have slept, when stationary, from two to four hours, with two favorable exceptions of five or six hours each (helped by chloral and bromide). I am sorry not to report more brilliant results. I should hope, however, for better luck were it not that the old lameness in my left knee — the result of water on the knee thirty-six years ago — has mysteriously returned after leaving me tolerably in peace for more than twenty years. The consequence is that I cannot walk above a few moments at a time without pain. Sometimes I can scarcely walk at all. This has lasted eight or nine days, and, though it fluctuates a good deal, it has not yet improved. Hence my plans are upset. As I lose ground here, and as traveling by rail is excessively difficult under the circumstances, I have beguiled Coolidge — who is the most disinterested of men — into making a straight course for the Mediterranean coast. We hope to find a steamer at Barcelona to carry us to Gibraltar, whence, if things improve with me, we will go together to Grenada, etc. But if the lameness continues, I see no use whatever in remaining on this side of the water. Therefore, unless there is perceptible improvement, I shall probably take a steamer at Gibraltar either directly for New York or indirectly by Southampton.

Yours very truly,

F. PARKMAN.

Postscript:

BARCELONA, 17 April.

Change of plan. No available steamer here for Gibraltar. Lameness rather worse. Mean to start for Paris by day train. When there, if lameness is in a better way than now, I mean to go at once to Schlungenbad. If on the other hand it shows no signs of improvement, I shall take passage for Boston, since living alone at Schlungenbad with no possibility of exercise cannot conduce to health. This cursed lameness is a thing which neither you nor I could foresee and which changes the whole situation.

Yours, F. P.

Parkman's insanity. — The collocation of the words "Parkman" and "insanity" arouses a scornful smile. Insanity was as impossible to that splendid and sound mental and cerebral mechanism as to any in the world. The best proof is that the awful irritation, insult, injury and strain which it endured did not cause it to swerve from its perfect poise and self-control for a minute. And yet the absurd suspicion was entertained by some, and with the thought Parkman was forced to play. He never seriously believed in the theory, but he could play with it as only an eminently sane mind can with such things. Like all eyestrain sufferers, like those especially we have studied, Parkman had the greatest need, physically, mentally and particularly ocularly, of much out-of-door life and exercise. The irritable reflexes from the eyes were always surcharging the battery of his brain, which, chronically in a state of overtension, needed the physical exercise and the ocular rest. His captivity from lameness must have been grievous to bear, and he sought compensation for it in many ways. There is another reason why his lameness must have greatly embittered his mind, although he alludes to it but once. When the war broke out in 1861, what suffering it must have caused him that he could not join the army! What a general he would have made!

This virtue (cheerfulness) had exceptional value in his case, because of his *inherited affection* of the brain; and he was fortunate in early coming to the belief that insanity often begins in moods and mental conditions that at the beginning can be avoided. (Farnham.)

Of course we now know that Parkman had no "inherited affection" and no "affection of the brain." The same superfluous insinuation is

shown in Farnham's "The overstrain of his early life was most regrettable in helping to develop some inherited tendency to disorders of the brain and nervous system." There was no more "overstrain of his early life" than thousands of others have endured unharmed. What overstrain there was had no causal relation with his lifelong suffering. He had no "inherited tendency to disorders," and he had no "disorders of the brain and nervous system." Farnham is correct when he writes of Parkman, "He had an 'inborn irritability of constitution,' as he said, which made 'labor a passion and rest intolerable.' His mysterious affection of the brain seems to have consisted in good part of this spurring force." To have hit the truth so patly and to have missed it so completely is strange when every fact of Parkman's life tragedy was glaringly bound up with ocular function.

Miss Parkman in a personal communication to me says she judges that the symptoms that suggested insanity were pressure upon, in or about the head, his "stirred up head" and the rushing activity of the brain. All these are most common symptoms of eyestrain.

Farnham, in another place, says:

His most insidious enemy was brain trouble. His physician in Paris, the most noted specialist of his day, had said that he might go insane and that his cure was extremely doubtful. The wisdom of making known this diagnosis to the patient has been questioned; but it perhaps was the only course, in view of the precautions that had to be an important element of his daily life. In his autobiography he speaks of the medical opinions and his danger in the jocose way frequent with him in mentioning even his worst condition. But the inevitable weighed at times upon his mind. He occasionally expressed wonder at not going insane with so much nervous exhaustion from insomnia, and he asked one or two intimate literary friends to watch for signs of mental disorder in his writings.

Parkman doubtless enjoyed the fun of setting two friends upon such a quixotic hunt! Of a similar chase by expert sportsmen, Parkman himself wrote:

One physician, with grave circumlocution, lest the patient should take fright, informed him that he was the victim of an organic disease of the brain which must needs dispatch him to another world within a twelve-month; and he stood amazed at the smile of an auditor who neither cared for the announcement nor believed it. Another, an eminent physiologist of Paris, after an acquaintance of three months, one day told him that, from the nature of the disorder, he had at first supposed that it must, in accordance with precedent, be attended with insanity, and had ever since been studying him to discover under what form the supposed aberration declared itself, adding, with a somewhat humorous look, that his researches had not been rewarded with the smallest success.

Mr. Parkman's home physician, Dr. Oliver, writes me that he thinks it was Brown-Sequard who made the statement that there was danger of insanity, and who told Parkman to go home at once, as he would soon be out of his mind. The "danger" was very far from "weighing on Parkman's mind," however puzzled he might be as to the mysterious nature of his malady. Thank heaven the sane mind and heroic character of the man "neither cared for the announcement nor believed it."

Parkman's insomnia.—Farnham has written of the "Oregon Trail" journey:

Suffering as he did from troubles of digestion, he was unable to sleep during the night; when at dawn he dozed off exhausted, his guide had to call him to depart. Thus began the insomnia that wearied him persistently all the rest of his days. From that time onward, during long periods of time, he would get but two or three hours of sleep out of the twenty-four; he often had less than this, or even none, and when four or five hours of unconsciousness came, he enjoyed an unusual blessing. His confi-

dence in nature made him doubtful of physicians and drugs, and gave him most hope in the natural powers of the body. Insomnia so prolonged and persistent was one of the greatest of his physical trials; it indeed seemed that insanity must at last result from this exhausting and irritating form of suffering.

His sister, Miss Eliza S. Parkman, told me in regard to the insomnia that to sleep none at night was uncommon, to sleep about an hour was common and latterly under his physician's advice, and, by the aid of sulphonal, trional or some other hypnotic, to get from four or five hours of sleep was possible. Oculists are now well aware by the reiterated statements of their patients that almost all severe eyestrain produces insomnia. The irritated and surcharged brain, "stirred up" as Parkman described it, during the day cannot be quieted, and the healing power of rest is denied the very organ that brings healing to the rest of the organism.

Parkman's eyes.—Although the method of Zadig is the method of symptomatology and diagnosis, neither the numerous physicians he consulted during his life, nor the patient himself, neither his relatives nor friends, recognized that he had five symptoms which among others are common in eyestrain. These are, in order of their distinctness, redness of and pain in the eyeballs; photophobia, or sensitiveness to light; blepharitis, or inflammation of the edges of the eyelids; inability to use the eyes "at near range,"—reading or writing,—and sundry cerebral reflexes, whenever this near use was attempted. The reverse of this order is that of importance, and the fact is suggestive of the dullness of perception and slowness of recognition of the rôle of eyestrain in medicine and in all modern life.

(1) Miss Parkman tells me that her brother

did not have what would be called "bloodshot" eyes. In Parkman's nature physical and neural matters never went to the positively fatal extremes. A wise restraint even in the severest disorders prevented the fatal exaggerations. He stopped in time. But he had red and painful eyes. The pain in the eyes was nearly constant.

(2) *Photophobia*. — In the two pictures of Parkman given in Farnham's biography one will notice that across the coat lapels and shirt front are the lines made by a loop of cord passed about the neck and disappearing beneath the coat. It is striking that few remember his use of these lenses, but this is a common fact, illustrated by many historic cases, notably that of the musician Wagner. Farnham does not speak of the fact that Parkman (as told me by his sister) habitually or often wore eyeglasses after middle life, and he also wore colored glasses when the light was strong. The colored lenses were the old-fashioned "goggles," with wire meshes about the glass. The silk cord was not, of course, used with these. He chose northern rooms for his studies, and when traveling; he disliked reflections of light from other houses, walls, etc., and he chose the shaded portions of the room to sit in, or kept the room itself in a twilight condition of illumination. According to Miss Parkman he was more comfortable in cloudy weather. His eyes, while in Switzerland, gave out entirely in sunny days, and he was especially liable to attacks of cerebral irritation ("stirred up head") during such days. At Blois, France, Miss Parkman remembers that in 1871 he could not walk out in the daytime at all, and driving in the dark was disliked because it strained his eyes and seemed to hurt him to attempt (as he felt impelled to do) to see objects. He therefore was able to be out of

doors only in the twilight. Light or multiple lights arouse accommodative effort, and, as we know, Parkman's accommodation was always strained to its utmost. For this reason he never went to the theater, opera, concerts, lectures, etc. His photophobia also doubled his suffering in another way, as it prevented the life out of doors, which he needed so much. He was confined, therefore, to a vicious circle — his sensitiveness to light confined him too much, thus intensifying his ocular and brain irritation, and in its turn making light still more harmful to the eyes. Patients with severe eyestrain showing the reflexes to the head and eyes most commonly complain of this dread of light, and in many cases it is a source of bitter suffering and trouble. Parkman himself thought he could not repeat his "Oregon Trail" experience because the sunlight would have blinded him. Glasses correcting his ametropia would have banished his photophobia instantly. A curious fact in this connection is his use of orange-colored paper for writing upon in the last part of his life. I have known three patients with severe eyestrain who chose such paper, and who believed that its use was almost necessary for their comfort in writing.

(3) *Blepharitis*. — Farnham writes that "his gray, penetrating eyes were, in youth, of good size, but in later years they seemed smaller because of chronic inflammation of the lids." Miss Parkman tells me that she often noticed "scales" on the lid edges and that he had "irritable lids." She also says he habitually used some lotion, probably solutions of boric acid and camphor (now constantly ordered by physicians for such lid affections), usually applied at night. I have learned that he was subject to another result of eyestrain, the lid tumors called "meibomian

cysts." Two of these were excised by two of his oculists. Parkman never winced during the operation. Farnham makes an excusable error in supposing the narrowing of the palpebral opening, which he calls smaller eyes, was due to the lid affection. It was, of course, due to the habitual attempt to shut out the painful light by partially closing the lids. In this way the width of the opening of the lids was chronically reduced, and he seemed to have "smaller eyes." All albinos have the same appearance and from the same habit. Although Parkman was not a myope, it may be noted that the word "myopia" is derived from Greek words which mean to close the eyes. The reason that myopes also habitually narrow the lid opening is a different one.

Even in England it is now and at last recognized that blepharitis is usually due to eyestrain, so that whatever palliative measures may be ordered for sealy and ulcerous lid edges, all oculists now tell their patients that the only permanent cure of the condition is properly correcting lenses of the ametropia.

(4) *Inability to use the eyes at near range* is the most glaring symptom of eyestrain. It now seems to us incomprehensible that even in Parkman's early and adult life he, and especially his physicians, should not have recognized that the cause of this anomalous and tragical fact lay in an abnormalism of the optical functions of the eyes. The vast majority of his friends and of all civilized people could work at sewing, reading, writing, and other hand work, and for many hours a day without resultant symptoms and in complete unconsciousness. Parkman shirked study as a boy, as a student and as a young man and each year of added life lessened his accommodative power and narrowed his ocular working

ability, until finally this was reduced to a minute or two at a time, and in all to a half hour or so a day.¹¹ Finally came the "gridiron" period, when he could not even write his name without pain, and he had to renounce all near-range work whatsoever. With the most sympathetic imagination one cannot realize the awfulness of such a fact to a man of Parkman's tastes and will. Ten years of my own life lost in the same way, and from precisely the same causes, help me to understand the workings of the mind of Parkman under this terrible blow of a mysterious fate. If Parkman had lived at the present time he could have found the relief from his disability and suffering in the same way that thousands have done. "The pity of it!"

(5) *Cerebral reflexes*.—In his boyhood Parkman had headaches, and was spoken of as "a headache child;" but in his adult life, according to his sister, he did not have what was ordinarily called headache, although Farnham speaks of "pains in the head" as continually sapping his force. The most revelatory statement I have been able to get from Miss Parkman is that the expression he used most was that his head was "stirred up," and that this was used by him when he could not work or listen to reading any longer. Miss Parkman understands by this expression what physicians call subjective vertigo and an indescribable confusion. Objects did not whirl or seem unstable, but the patient himself. There was also a rush of vague and uncontrollable sensations. Sometimes these were roused by talking or noises,

¹¹ I have a suspicion that in some cases, especially in such intense natures as that of Parkman, there may be some eyestrain even in dictating with eyes closed. The effort to visualize (and that is the usual mechanics of intellect) the images and sentences might arouse both convergence and accommodation of the eyes, and thus during composition and nonwalking intellectual activity there would not be entire ocular rest.

so that silence was necessary even at meals in order not to bring on irritation. From a study of the few hints I can gather I feel that the morbid reflexes from the eyes kept his brain in a chronic state of hyperesthesia, the centers so surcharged that he was in a constant state of great tension, and a slight excess of irritation at any time was more than could be correlated or drained off physiologically. It was his splendid will and by infinite precautions that he could prevent harmful results.¹²

From this cause also what is commonly called irritability or temper was never shown. His sister remembers no cross, unkind or petulant expression to have escaped him, however great the provocation. His beautiful mind seemed guarded against such outbreaks by a subtle feeling that it was his own nervous mechanism that was at fault. He never mistook the "wild whirl" in his head as caused by any whirl of the outside world. When it was impossible for him to listen longer to reading, or to conversation, or to apply himself mentally to any work, he seemed to find relief in inventing a string of nonsensical or ridiculous stories *à propos de rien*. Introspective he was not, and as to neurasthenia, hysteria or melancholy, the words are not to be thought of. Finally it must not be forgotten that the vagueness of the cerebral symptoms is no proof of their unreality or lack of intensity, as shown by the fact that he was supposed to be on the verge of insanity, and that first and last he consulted many physicians about his condition of mind and nerves. There was nothing vague, however, about

¹² Influences tending to depress the mind had at all times proved far less injurious than those tending to excite, or even pleasurably exhilarate, and a lively conversation has often been a cause of serious mischief. A cautious vigilance has been necessary from the first, and this cerebral devil has perhaps had his uses as a teacher of philosophy. (Autobiography.)

his terrible and lifelong insomnia, which was certainly a consequence of his eyestrain.

The reactions or responses of each organism under the morbid stimulus or "insult" of eyestrain differ from those in any other case. That every case of disease is individual, impossible to bring into any narrow or exact classification is of course a truism in medicine. The typical case exists only in the textbook. But holding the essential fact in view one easily recognizes a common law that runs through and harmonizes all individual variations and renders clear the unity in all exceptions. All this is illustrated and verified by Parkman's case. In a general way the symptoms in severe cases of eyestrain roughly divide patients into three classes: (1) Those in whom the reflexes are to the eyes themselves, resulting in inflammations, disordered function and local diseases of many varieties. (2) Those to the brain, followed by a large variety of kinds of headache, psychic and nervous abnormalism, insomnia, etc. (3) Those to the digestive and nutritional systems, with "biliousness," anorexia, dyspepsia and any of the diseases of denutrition. It goes without saying that these types may be mixed in infinite degrees of complexity and intensity, but as a rule a certain case belongs in one of these three classes.

When the reflex is exclusively to the organs of nutrition, as in Carlyle's case, the mental concomitant is likely to be hypochondriasis, irascibility, etc. In Parkman's case the morbid reflexes expended themselves upon the eyes and the cerebral centers. Cheerfulness and a noble high-heartedness are noteworthy characteristics of the man, although none ever had better reason for despair and complaint. That neither black bile

nor yellow bile tinged Parkman's brain is shown by the following sentence written of himself:

His dislike of everything morbid — melancholy, misanthropy, depression — amounted to abhorrence, and if he could not be cheerful he went away if he was able; and if not, he held his tongue or turned to merry thoughts.

In many cases of reflex ocular neuroses we can find crises of the resultant symptoms occurring at certain life periods. In Parkman's case these crises are not evident. But one exists with any clearness, that of presbyopia. The others are at best masked. But one can see why they are masked. As in everything else this man was exceptional, logical to the limit. Every day and year was critical. He was of the heroic type, and not measurable by our little rules of thumb, applicable to the weaker and commoner man. Evidently his eye defect was of an exceptional kind, such as a low degree of unsymmetric astigmatism and anisometropia would produce. I say a low degree, because Parkman had sharp distant vision, showing that he could neutralize the abnormalism for distant vision. Most surely he could only do so for a minute or so at a time for near vision. A man of his iron will and exactness would also never give up the attempt to do so as long as it was humanly possible. I have known hardly any patient so incapable of reading and writing as he, or with a photophobia so intense. His astigmatism was of a kind that his ciliary muscle or his accommodative power could in adult life bear the strain of the attempt to neutralize it at near range for but a minute or two at a time. Even as a boy it produced headaches and truancy, and the crisis of adolescence is represented by the breaking off the college course by the trips to Europe. Using up

each minute every infinitesimal gathering of accommodative power, both ocular and cerebral, by his studies and by the intensity of his nature, crises could not be as marked and differentiated as in less stalwart men and less resistant cases. Hence the steady decrease of reading and writing power went on exactly *pari passu* with the yearly lessening of the power of the ciliary muscle to overcome the lenticular inelasticity. The eyeglasses prescribed or that he picked up could only further mask the critical periods that would normally have appeared in early manhood and at the usual presbyopic time of life.

Even with the life of terrible suffering he had lived, and with the resultant injuries to the ocular and cerebral centers, the completion of presbyopia at about sixty brought him, as it does all others, a comparative ease and happiness and power of using the eyes during the last ten years of life. "During the last few years of his life," says Farnham, "his eyes allowed him to write quite freely for very short periods of time. Thus he was able to write out by himself with pencil on orange-colored paper the greater part of his 'Half Century,' and 'Montcalm and Wolfe.' " "He was better and a happier man after sixty," said his sister to me. "From the earliest of his married life," adds Farnham, "onward till near the close, the condition of his brain seemed to make it necessary for him to be silent and alone most of the time. But, as years rolled on, the improvement in his health, the easier progress of his labor and the development of his sympathy enabled him at last to meet life with happier moods and habits."

There can be no doubt in the mind of the modern ophthalmologist as to the cause of Parkman's eyestrain and hence of all its results. Every symptom enumerated can be entirely and only

accounted for on the supposition that he had hyperopic astigmatism, probably unsymmetrical, and with anisometropia. There is every reason for the conviction that he had no organic disease of the eyes. He saw as well at night as other people, and so had not any form of retinitis. He recognized things and people so accurately in the daytime that one may be sure there was no considerable amblyopia or other limitation, or organically-caused defect of vision. No operation except upon the lids was ever performed upon his eyes.

I had written thus far from all the data that I could gain by reading and correspondence. It now occurred to me that a personal search might win the confirmation of my view which, not needed by oculists to bring conviction as to the true nature of Parkman's disease, would serve to prove the necessary inferences I had drawn, and would also make the fact plainer to general physicians and laymen. I therefore made a journey to Parkman's home, and after an active hunt of the records of oculists, physicians and of opticians I secured precisely the scientific confirmation of my theory desired. I found that Parkman from the first had not failed, at least partially, to recognize — how could he fail to do so? — the importance of his ocular condition. In 1849 he had gone to New York, and for a long time placed himself under the care of an oculist. No good, of course, came of it, and as this specialist is now dead we could not learn much of value from any case records that might still exist. The ophthalmoscope had not yet been invented, and as for astigmatism none had thought of it as having a pathogenic significance.

By the courtesy of an optical firm I found the following filed prescriptions:

(1) One from an excellent oculist dated April 12, 1881, ordering:

For the right eye + Sph. 2 + Cyl. 0.50 ax. 108°.

For the left eye + Sph. 2.75.

(2) From another equally competent specialist in 1883:

R. + Sph. 2.75 D.

L. + Sph. 2.75 D.

(3) From the same oculist, in 1885:

R. + Sph. 3.00 D.

L. + Sph. 3.00 D.

(4) In December, 1890, another equally trustworthy oculist ordered:

R. + Sph. 3.25 D.

L. + Sph. 3.25 D.

In addition he was wearing prior to 1881 from a famous European oculist:

R. + Sph. 2.25 D.

L. + Sph. 2.60 D.

I was greatly aided in my search by the courtesy of several oculists, who kindly placed their case records at my disposal.

I may at this point settle the question as to any abnormal or inflammatory disease of the retina. One oculist had kept no case records of Mr. Parkman's case. A second had made no entry as to any retinal condition, and being a capable ophthalmoscopist he would have noted the fact had the funduses of the eyes not been normal. The third positively placed in his notes "Fundus normal." Had this testimony not been found, the ignorant-wise might have said that Parkman must have had some retinal disease that caused the inability to read and the photophobia.

The notebook of one oculist says that the patient had recently consulted a most famous nerve specialist whom he had journeyed to see on account of "pressure and confusion in the head," which symptoms came on with literary overwork or excitement. This man had ordered some bicarbonate of soda and wet packs. Many

years before Parkman had tried hydropathy and he would no more of it.

We see, therefore, that one European oculist found some difference in refraction in the two eyes but no astigmatism. An American oculist found a similar difference in the hyperopia of the two eyes, and he alone of all found astigmatism "against the rule." Three other prescriptions by two different oculists were for nonastigmatic lenses, alike in both eyes. A revelatory and explanatory fact was found in the case records of one of the latter oculists. This was that the astigmatic lines of the test card running at about axis 120° (judging from the penciled diagram drawn in the notebook) were chosen by the patient as being the plainest at fifteen feet distance, as seen by the right eye, and those running about 155° or 160° were seen more clearly with the left eye. Why glasses correcting this astigmatism were not ordered I do not know. Why the astigmatic correction ordered for the right eye by the other oculist was put at 180° , and why no correction of astigmatism was ordered for the left eye is also not clear.

I may parenthetically state that one oculist found the acuteness of vision in the right eye with — Cyl. 0.5 D. ax. 90° a little less than normal, and with + Sph. 0.25 that of the left eye was about the same. The oculist who noted that the patient chose the asymmetric astigmatic lines found the "media good," and that without any correcting lenses the visual acuteness was with the right eye 12/20, and with the left less, that is, a little more than one-half that of normal eyes.¹³ If any deduction is justified by this it is only that there

¹³ He also notes — what was to be expected — that there was no hyperphoria and, as measured by vertical prism diplopia, no considerable exophoria or esophoria.

was a decided lessening of the 20/20? visual acuteness from 1881 to 1889, when it was mentioned as only 12/20 or less. As the "media were good" at the latter date no cataract was present. Retinal sensibility was doubtless dulled by the life of abnormal function. Confirmatory of this is the fact that Parkman used a crossed cylinder hand lens during the last years of his life, besides his spectacles, to magnify the size of printed letters.

Incidentally we may understand how it was that Parkman did not get all the relief from completed presbyopia that others do. It was because, with his intense will and powerful innervation, presbyopia was probably never quite complete, and some ability to overcome his hyperopia and astigmatism would remain farther into old age than with others. The same fact also suggests that his astigmatism and hyperopia were always masked, and consequently underestimated without mydriasis, by the patient's exceptional ability to conceal it by his accommodation. Hence, in part, at least, the differences among oculists in estimating the ametropia and in discovering the very existence of astigmatism. It should also be noted that with an organization both mental and neurologic, dominated as it were by a passion for exactness, the comparatively low astigmatism and anisometropia that could be neutralized for only a minute or two at a time would be exceptionally tormenting, its conquering never renounced, nor never for more than an instant overcome.

From comparison of all the data the demonstration is therefore perfect that:

- (1) Parkman had unsymmetric astigmatism.
- (2) There was a certain difference in the hyperopia (that is, anisometropia) of the two eyes.

(3) There was a probable difference in the amount of astigmatism of the two eyes. Most important is the fact that it was unsymmetric.

(4) This unsymmetric astigmatism and anisometropia was not corrected by any of the glasses that were ordered for him.¹⁴

(5) These ametropic defects were of such a low degree that prior to completed presbyopia they did not prevent fairly accurate distant visual acuteness, the power of accommodation being sufficiently great to neutralize them for this purpose.

(6) But they were so high that even with Parkman's marvelous vigor of will and innervation they could not be overcome for but a minute or two, or at best five, at near range (that is, in reading and writing), and during many years, not even for a minute.

(7) The effort of overcoming the unsymmetric astigmatism and anisometropia was so great and so expensive of nerve force that it resulted in the ocular and cerebral symptoms enumerated.¹⁵ The almost unexampled severity of these symptoms was exceptional, because of the heroic resolution of the man and his indomitable perseverance in his chosen work.

The professional lesson. — Parkman had the best professional advice that the medical science of his time could offer. He consulted the best physicians of Europe and of America, but all, in fact, in vain. During the last fifteen years of his life, after Dr. S. Weir Mitchell and other Philadelphia physicians, about 1875, had demonstrated the

¹⁴ Two of the sets of lenses I have before me as I write, and the fact is proved true by "neutralization."

¹⁵ People who cannot hold their arm horizontal for five minutes think it is exaggeration when a worse muscular and nerve strain cannot be endured by steady innervation of the ciliary muscle for ten or fifteen hours a day!

relief of reflex ocular diseases by means of the correction of astigmatism, Parkman might have and should have found at least some relief, and at least might have learned the solution of the terrible mystery of his life which had made tragedy of its every day. Prior to 1868 he had written as follows of his experiences with our profession:

Meanwhile the faculty of medicine were not idle, displaying that exuberance of resource for which that remarkable profession is justly famed. The wisest indeed did nothing, commending his patient to time and faith; but the activity of his brethren made full amends for this masterly inaction. One was for tonics, another for a diet of milk; one counseled galvanism, another hydropathy; one scarred him behind the neck with nitric acid, another drew red-hot irons along his spine with a view of enlivening that organ. Opinion was as divergent as practice. One assured him of recovery in six years; another thought that he would never recover. Another with grave circumspection, lest the patient should take fright, informed him that he was the victim of an organic disease of the brain which must needs dispatch him to another world within a twelvemonth; and he stood amazed at the smile of an auditor who neither cared for the announcement nor believed it. Another, an eminent physiologist of Paris, after an acquaintance of three months, one day told him that, from the nature of the disorder, he had at first supposed that it must, in accordance with precedent, be attended with insanity, and had ever since been studying him to discover under what form the supposed aberration declared itself, adding with a somewhat humorous look that his researches had not been rewarded with the smallest success.

Farnham also says:

His general troubles were believed by the doctors to "come from an abnormal state or partial paralysis of certain arteries of the brain."

The last statement, while we smile, may afford a little instruction, because it is so characteristic of some puzzled practitioners when in the pres-

ence of a baffling mystery to fly to a word or term, or a far more mystifying explanation, and call that diagnosis.

The query remains as to Parkman's quizzical but no less terrible arraignment of us. There can be no more loyal member of the medical profession than I, none who believes more thoroughly that it is motivated upon an earnestness and unselfishness of purpose unequalled in any so large body of men, none who is more deeply convinced that the brethren of his guild are doing more for civilization and the world's regeneration than any other; and yet, in the face of the long delay before the pathologic significance of ametropia was discovered, before the still more criminal silence and neglect and even opposition to that truth by so many physicians since the discovery was made, — the philosophic observer gets a decided shock. This is all the more startling when we learn that many of the leaders of the profession were consulted by Parkman and since 1875, with no word of the explanation they should have known and of the cure they might have given. Many of them did not even keep any records or notes of the symptoms, diagnosis and treatment in his case. And yet more close comes the lesson when it is observed that despite the existence of hundreds of oculists at present capable of diagnosing and curing such diseases there are to-day in America at least a million such sufferers unrelieved, and in Europe many millions. In the presence of those who sneer at "exaggeration" and who kill by silence, before such wilful, not to say selfish ignoring, knowing the tons of "headache powders" sold by quack drug stores and even prescribed by medical men, viewing the vogue of the permitted and even encouraged "eyes-examined-free" criminal optician, — ponder-

ing upon the dignity of the "leading practitioner" and the "ophthalmic surgeon," who cannot bring himself to become "a spectacle peddler,"— one is constrained to echo Parkman's splendid indignation as to the pompous historical writer who is more concerned about himself and his profession than about prosaic truth. Once when upbraided for some accurate but "undignified" truth he broke out with, "Damn the dignity of history! Straws are often the best materials." The same splendid spirit should motive us. Let us cure our patients!

The following is the second autobiographic letter, now preserved by the Massachusetts Historical Society, and copied by the kindness of Miss Parkman. As it has never been printed I reproduce it herewith, because it presents his own view somewhat differently from the first letter, and as seen from a later time in life.

My dear Brimmer, — I once told you that I should give you some account of the circumstances under which my books were written. Here it is, with some preliminary pages to explain the rest. I am sorry there is so much of it:

Causes antedating my birth gave me constitutional liabilities to which I largely ascribe the mischief that ensued. As a child I was sensitive and restless, rarely ill, but never robust. At eight years I was sent to a farm belonging to my maternal grandfather on the outskirts of the extensive tract of wild and rough woodland now called Middlesex Fells. I walked twice a day to a school of high but undeserved reputation about a mile distant, in the town of Medford. Here I learned very little and spent the intervals of schooling more profitably in collecting eggs, insects and reptiles, trapping squirrels and woodchucks, and making persistent though rarely fortunate attempts to kill birds with arrows. After four years of this rustication I was brought back to Boston, when I was unhappily seized with a mania for experiments in chemistry involving a lonely, confined, unwholesome sort of life, baneful to body and mind. This lasted till the critical age of fifteen, when a complete change came over me — I

renounced crucibles and retorts and took to books; read poetry and fancied for a while that I could write it; conceived literary ambitions, and, at the same time, began to despise a literary life and to become enamored of the backwoods. This new passion — which proved permanent — was no doubt traceable in part to fond recollections of the Middlesex Fells, as well as to one or two journeys which I was permitted to make into some of the wilder parts of New England. It soon got full possession of me, and mixed itself with all my literary aspirations. In this state of mind I went to college, where I divided my time about equally between books and active exercises, of which last I grew inordinately fond, and in which I was ambitious beyond measure to excel.

My favorite backwoods were always in my thoughts. At first I tried to persuade myself that I could woo this new mistress in verse; then I came down to fiction, and at last reached the sage though not flattering conclusion that if I wanted to build in her honor any monument that would stand, I must found on solid fact. Before the end of the sophomore year my various schemes had crystallized into a plan of writing the story of what was thus known as the "Old French War;" that is, the war that ended in the conquest of Canada; for here, as it seemed to me, the forest drama was more stirring and the forest stage more thronged with appropriate actors than in any other passage of our history. It was not till some years later that I enlarged the plan to include the whole course of the American conflict between France and England; or, in other words, the history of the American forest; for this was the light in which I regarded it. My theme fascinated me and I was haunted with wilderness images day and night.

From this time forward, two ideas possessed me. One was to paint the forest and its tenants in true and vivid colors; the other was to realize a certain ideal of manhood, a little medieval, but nevertheless good. Feeling that I fell far short of it, I proceeded in extreme dissatisfaction to apply heroic remedies. I held the creed that the more hard knocks a man gets, whether in mind or body, the better for him, provided always that he takes them without flinching; and as the means of forcing myself up to the required standard, I put my faith in persistent violence which I thought energy. I held that the true aim of life was not happiness but achievement; had profound respect for physical strength and hardihood when joined with corresponding qualities of character;

took pleasure in any moderate hardship, scorned invalidism of all kinds, and was full of the notion, common enough with boys of a certain sort, that the body will always harden and toughen with exercise and exposure. I remember to have had a special aversion for the Rev. Dr. Channing, not for his heresies, but for his meager proportions, sedentary habits, environment of close air and female parishoners, and his preachments of the superiority of mind over matter; for, while I had no disposition to gainsay his proposition in the abstract, it was a cardinal point with me that while the mind remains a habitant of earth, it cannot dispense with a sound material basis, and that to neglect and decry the corporal part in the imagined interest of the spiritual is proof of a nature either emasculate or fanatical. For my own part, instead of neglecting, I fell to lashing and spurring it into vigor and prosperity.

Meanwhile I diligently pursued my literary scheme. While not exaggerating the importance of my subject, I felt that it had a peculiar life of its own of which I caught tantalizing glimpses, to me irresistibly attractive. I felt far from sure that I was equal to the task of rekindling it, calling out of the dust the soul and body of it and making it a breathing reality. I was like some smitten youth plagued with harrowing doubts as to whether he can win the mistress of his fancy. I tried to gauge my own faculties and was displeased with the result. Nevertheless I resolved that if my steed was not a thoroughbred I would at least get his best paces out of him, and I set myself to a strenuous course of training for the end in view. A prime condition of success was an unwearied delving into dusty books and papers, a kind of work which I detested; and I came to the agreeable yet correct conclusion that the time for this drudgery was not come; that my present business was, so to speak, to impregnate myself with my theme, fill my mind with impressions from real life, range the woods, mix with Indians and frontiersmen, visit the scenes of the events I meant to describe, and so bring myself as near as might be to the times with which I was to deal. Accordingly I spent all my summer vacations in the woods or in Canada, at the same time reading such books as I thought suited, in a general way, to help me towards my object. I pursued these lucubrations with a pernicious intensity, keeping my plans and purposes to myself, while passing among my companions as an outspoken fellow.

The danger into which I was drifting rose from the ex-

cessive stimulus applied to nerves which had too much stimulus of their own. I was not, however, at all nervous in the sense in which that term is commonly understood, and I regarded nervous people with more piety than esteem. The mischief was working underground. If it had come to the surface the effects would probably have been less injurious. I flattered myself I was living wisely because I avoided the more usual excesses, but I fell into others quite as baneful, riding my hobbies with unintermitting vehemence and carrying bodily exercise to a point where it fatigues instead of strengthening. In short, I burned the candle at both ends.

The first hint that my method of life was not to prove a success occurred in my junior year, in the shape of a serious disturbance in the action of the heart, of which the immediate cause was too violent exercise in the gymnasium. I was thereupon ordered to Europe, where I spent the greater part of a year, never losing sight of my plans and learning much that helped to forward them. Returning in time to graduate with my class, I was confronted with the inevitable question, What next? The strong wish of my father that I should adopt one of the so-called regular professions, determined me to enter the Harvard Law School.

Here, while following the prescribed courses at a quiet pace, I entered in earnest on two other courses, one of general history, the other of Indian history and ethnology, and at the same time studied diligently the models of English style; which various pursuits were far from excluding the pleasures of society. In the way of preparation and preliminary to my principal undertaking, I now resolved to write the history of the Indian War under Pontiac, as offering peculiar opportunities for exhibiting forest life and Indian character; and to this end I began to collect materials by travel and correspondence. The labor was not slight, for the documents were widely scattered on both sides of the Atlantic; but at the beginning of 1846 the collection was nearly complete.

I had been conscious for some time of an overstimulated condition of the brain. While constantly reminding myself that the task before me was a long one, that haste was folly and that the slow way was the surer and better one, I felt myself spurred forward irresistibly. It was like a rider whose horse has got the bit between his teeth, and who, while seeing his danger, cannot stop. As the mischief gave no outward sign, nobody was aware of it but myself. At last, however, a weakness of the eyes, which

was one of its symptoms, increased so fast that I was forced to work with the eyes of others. I now resolved to execute a scheme which I had long meditated. This was to visit the wild tribes of the far West, and live among them for a time, as a necessary part of training for my work. I hoped by exchanging books and documents for horse and rifle to gain three objects at once — health, use of sight and personal knowledge of savage life. The attempt did not prosper. I was attacked on the plains by a wasting and dangerous disorder, which had not ceased when I returned to the frontier five months later. In the interval I was for some weeks encamped with a roving band of Sioux at the Rocky Mountains, with one rough though not unfaithful attendant. It would have been suicidal to accept the part of an invalid, and I was sometimes all day in the saddle, when in civilized life complete rest would have been thought indispensable. I lived like my red companions, and sometimes joined them in their hunting, with the fatiguing necessity of being always armed and on the watch. To one often giddy with the exhaustion of disease, the strain on the system was great. After going back to civilization the malady gradually subsided after setting in action a train of other disorders which continued its work. In a year or more I was brought to a state of nervous prostration that debarred all mental effort, and was attended with a weakness of sight that for a time threatened blindness. Before reaching this pass I wrote the "Oregon Trail" by dictation. Complete repose, to me the most detestable of prescriptions, was enjoined upon me, and from intense activity I found myself doomed to helpless inaction. Such chance of success as was left lay in time, patience and a studied tranquility of spirit; and I felt, with extreme disgust, that there was nothing for it but to renounce past maxims and habits and embrace others precisely the opposite. An impulse seized me to return to the Rocky Mountains, try a hair of the dog that bit me, and settle squarely the question to be or not to be. It was the time of the Mexican War, and I well remember with what envious bitterness I looked at a colored print in a shop window, representing officers and men carrying a field battery into action at the battle of Buena Vista. I believe that I would willingly have borne any amount of bodily pain, provided only I could have bought with it the power of action.

After a while — as anything was better than idleness — I resolved on cautiously attempting to make use of the documents already collected for the "Conspiracy of Pon-

tiac." They were read to me by friends and relatives at times when the brain was least rebellious, and I wrote without use of sight by means of a sort of literary grid-iron, or frame of parallel wires, laid on the page to guide the hand. For some months the average rate of progress did not exceed three or four lines a day, and the chapters thus composed were afterwards rewritten. If, as I was told, brain work was poison, the dose was homeopathic and the effect was good, for within a year I could generally work, with the eyes of others, two hours or more a day, and in about three years the book was finished.

I then began to gather materials for the earlier volumes of the series of France and England in North America, though, as I was prevented from traveling by an extreme sensitiveness of the retina which made sunlight insupportable, the task of collection seemed hopeless. I began, however, an extensive correspondence, and was flattering myself that I might succeed at last when I was attacked with an effusion of water on the knee which subsided in two or three months, then returned, kept me a prisoner for two years, and deprived me of necessary exercise for several years more. The consequence was that the devil which had been partially exorcised returned triumphant. The evil now centered in the head, producing cerebral symptoms of such a nature that, in 1853, the physician who attended me at the time, after cautious circumlocution, said in a low and solemn voice that his duty required him to warn me that death would probably follow within six months, and stood amazed at the smile of incredulity with which the announcement was received. I had known my enemy longer than he, and learned that its mission was not death but only torment. Five years later another physician — an eminent physiologist of Paris, where I then was — tried during the whole winter to discover the particular manifestations of the insanity which he was convinced must needs attend the symptoms he had observed, and told me at last what he had been about. "What conclusion have you reached?" I asked. "That I never knew a saner man in my life." "But," said I, "what is the chance that this brain of mine will ever get into working order again?" He shook his head and replied, "It is not impossible" — with which I was forced to content myself.

Between 1852 and 1860 this cerebral rebellion passed through great and seemingly capricious fluctuations. It had its ebbs and floods. Slight and sometimes imperceptible causes would produce an access which sometimes

lasted with little respite for months. When it was in its milder moods I used the opportunity to collect material and prepare ground for future work, should work ever become practicable. When it was at its worst the condition was not enviable. I could neither listen to reading nor engage in conversation, even of the lightest. Sleep was difficult and was often banished entirely for one or two nights, during which the brain was apt to be in a state of abnormal activity, which had to be repressed at any cost, since thought produced the intensest torture. The effort required to keep the irritated organ quiet was so fatiguing that I occasionally rose and spent hours in the open air, where I found distraction and relief in watching the policemen and the tramps on the malls of Boston Common, at the risk of passing for a tramp myself. Towards the end of the night this cerebral excitation would seem to tire itself out, and gave place to a condition of weight and oppression much easier to bear.

Having been inclined to look with slight esteem on invalidism, the plight in which I found myself was mortifying; but I may fairly say that I never called on others to bear the burden of it, and always kept up a show of equanimity and good humor. The worst strain on these was when the Civil War broke out and I was doomed to sit an idle looker on.

After it became clear that literary work must be indefinitely suspended, I found a substitute in horticulture; and am confident that I owe it in good measure to the kindly influence of that gracious pursuit that the demon in the brain was gradually soothed into comparative quiet. In 1861 I was able, with frequent interruptions, to take up my work again. At the same time there was such amendment as regards sight that I could bear the sunlight without blinking and read for several minutes at once without stopping to rest the eyes, though my chief dependence was still in those of others. In 1865 "The Pioneers" was finished, and the capacity of work both of brain and eye had much increased. "The Jesuits" was finished in 1867; "The Discovery of the Great West," in 1869; "The Old Régime," in 1874; and "Frontenac," in 1877. "Montcalm and Wolfe," which involved more labor, was not ready till 1884.

While engaged on these books I made many journeys in the United States and Canada in search of material, and went four times to Europe with a similar object. The task of exploring archives and collecting documents, to me repulsive at the best, was, under the circumstances,

difficult, and would have been impossible but for the aid of competent assistants working under my direction.

Taking the last forty years as a whole, the capacity of literary work which during that time has fallen to my share has, I am confident, been considerably less than a fourth part of what it would have been under normal conditions. Whether the historical series in hand will ever be finished I do not know, but shall finish it if I can.

Yours faithfully,

F. PARKMAN.

JAMAICA PLAIN, 28 Oct., 1886.

